



**One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

May 27, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

With the Memorial Day holiday upon us, the summer travel season is now underway. According the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), flight delays this summer could be greater than in any year past. While there is little that can be done about weather-related disruptions, I believe that delays caused by congestion at airport passenger checkpoints can be avoided or ameliorated. I believe that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) should have strategies in place to safely and effectively process the estimated 200 million Americans who will fly this summer.

In recent months, delays at our nation's airports have been on the increase. In fact, between January and March, the FAA found that a fourth of all flights at 55 domestic airports were delayed an average of 52.3 minutes. Furthermore, there are six airports that the FAA expects to experience significant delays this summer -- Philadelphia International Airport, New York LaGuardia Airport, Newark International Airport, Washington Dulles Airport, Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport and Fort Lauderdale Airport. What, if any, plans or protocols has TSA developed to address surge in the volume of passengers at these airports and all of our nation's airports?

I strongly believe that to effectively prepare for surges in passenger volume, TSA should work with air carriers and airport operators to incorporate lessons learned from previous busy travel periods. This approach will help ensure that screening resources are properly deployed to protect and process the flying public in an effective and timely fashion.


I also believe that TSA should assess screening resources to strike the balance between the number of part and full-time screeners. As a means of meeting this goal, has TSA considered providing Federal Security Directors (FSD) the authority to make local hiring and staffing decisions in order to augment the staff at their airport?

Additionally, has TSA sought to develop a metric for the average time required to effectively and efficiently process passengers and baggage at each airport – both during the summer surge period and during other times of the year? This metric could be used to evaluate whether each airport is meeting screening demands efficiently. Development of this standard could also help TSA make decisions about how best to deploy resources at checkpoints.

This summer presents TSA with an opportunity to demonstrate to America's flying public that our skies can be secured without passengers being unduly inconvenienced. The projected numbers of passengers presents TSA with a unique set of challenges that can be overcome through effective planning and collaborative work with the aviation community.

Given that the busy summer season is underway, I would appreciate a response to my letter no later than June 15, 2005.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bennie" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Thompson".

Bennie G. Thompson

Ranking Member

House Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Christopher Cox, Chairman, House Committee on Homeland Security